



## Naga-Mandala: A Desire of Psychic Integration

**Pallavi Gupta**

Research Scholar, University Of Jammu, India

EMAIL: [pallavigupta12@yahoo.co.in](mailto:pallavigupta12@yahoo.co.in)

### Abstract

*The paper attempts to explore how the repressions of desires in human beings take indirect form and stand in front of them creating a conflict within and without in GirishKarnad's play Naga-Mandala: Play with a Cobra. Based on folk-lore tradition, Naga-Mandala represents the ontological and psychical problems of society. The play uses symbolic language which is interpreted psychoanalytically to reveal the latent content of the mind. It views the psychology of man and woman on two levels, the worldly and other worldly. It is a study to bring out the split in one's identity because of the conflicts between life of instincts and regulations and a study of his/her quest for attaining the unattainable through psychoanalytic approach.*

### Key Words:

Folk-Tales; Split; Conscious; Unconscious; Subconscious

### Paper:

From time immemorial people have turned towards plays to seek diversion. People wanted to see life in its variety, something other than the blind reality to stimulate, inspire and gratify his/ her senses. Thus drama had always been a factory to generate emotions and stimulate them. Psychoanalysis studies these emotions. Psychoanalysis approach is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psycho-analysis in the interpretation of Literature. Based on folk-lore tradition, *Naga-Mandala* in the robe of myth

represents the ontological and psychical problems. Folk-tales give insight into the cultures, rituals, customs and psychology of a particular society. Folk-tales use symbolic language which can be interpreted psychoanalytically to reveal the latent content of the mind. These tales use symbols and customs related to a particular culture to bring out the conflicts, anxieties and forbidden content of the unconscious. These tales represent the social and culture hypocrisy and also the effects of these tales on individual psyche. Thus, the present paper is an attempt to study the ways in which Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* within the structure of folk-tale views the psychology of woman-man on two levels, the worldly and other worldly. A study to bring the split in one's identity because of the conflicts between life of instincts and regulations and a study of his/her quest for attaining the unattainable, from a psycho-analytic approach. It is the story of a young girl named Rani, a princess to her parents wedded off to Appana, any man, who is ignorant and cruel to her. Marriage with him brings Rani her first encounter with loneliness and neglect. Her search for the warm embrace meets the indifference in Appana. He confined her physically, mentally and emotionally. Appana is the prototype of patriarchal society, to whom a wife should not ask questions and do, what she is told to do. She should do the household chores and policed, arrested within the house. Appana's tyranny represses the instinctual needs of Rani. The



complexities arising out of the process of repression and depression due to isolation and alienation fills Rani with depressive mood. She becomes the subject of *Object Relation Theory* which emphasizes the internalization of relations to others as formative force that creates the self. According to Ryan in *Object Relation Theory*: “An initial symbiotic relationship with parents evolves into relation of mature independence of them, and this occurs through the development of a sense of object constancy, an ability to live in the stable world of objects to which one relates without anxieties about separation or fusion” (Ryan 36). But in Rani’s case separation from parents wasn’t met with fusion to her husband. She lives alone, the loneliness gives way to anxiety and neurotic behaviour which can be traced in her self-talks. She talks to herself and compares herself to the princess of folk-tales, who is caught by a demon, her sub-consciousness tells her it’s enough, the pot of her endurance is filled and she can’t bear more, a solution is to come: “Rani: ...So the demon locks her up in the castle. Then it rains for seven days and seven nights. It pours. The sea floods the big city. The waters break down the door of the castle. Then the big whale comes to Rani and says: ‘Come, Rani, let us go...’ (Karnad 1:263). Her self-talk is suggested of her inner conflict. She finds her solution in not some human, but in a whale. The contextual referents of the word determine its denotative and suggestive meanings apart from its connative meaning. Whale suggests a powerful animal, symbolizes wisdom. In Kurudavva, Rani found mother figure, the wise figure. Kurudavva is the prototype of agony-aunts in folktales, she is the only person Rani has talked to other than Appana after her marriage. She comes with a magical solution to

save the marriage of Rani and provides her with pieces of aphrodisiac root to give them to her husband. Rani though hesitant first, but the will to conquer her man is bigger. But instead of giving the herb to her husband she ends up throwing it in the ant-hill. The charm has worked now. Not on Appana, but the King Cobra, who consumed the herb in the ant-hill. No anger, but contempt in Appana’s actions indubitably marks his duality in King Cobra, representing his instinctual side, which he didn’t want to reveal. But Rani’s magic has awakened this side of his and now he has to surrender to Rani: “As you know, a cobra can assume any form it likes. That night, it entered the house through the bathroom drain and took the shape of- (The Cobra takes the shape of Appana)” (Karnad 1:267).

A Serpent (Naga) is an archetype of energy, sensuality, mystery; Wisdom; the unconscious. A Mandala (a geometric figure based upon the squaring of a circle around a unifying centre, cyclic time) is an archetype of desire for spiritual unity and Psychic integration. As such, *Naga-Mandala* denotes a world dominated by Naga. The reference to circular time and space evokes an image of concentric circle in motion that move outwards only to start all over again. The shifting of Naga into Appana denotes Appana’s unconscious. In the shape of Naga, his instinctive self comes live. Naga, with his phallic connotation may be seen as a projection of Appana’s own id, unbound and rampant. Such are the monstrous consequences of libidinous obsession, unchecked by ego and ungoverned by superego. The split of his personality becomes visible. ‘The Naga is Appana’, this can be observed from his entrance, as he questions Rani about things, which are between them two alone, as Rani doesn’t have anyone to talk to and a husband doesn’t talk about



the beatings he gives to his wife: “Did it hurt the beating this morning?” “Locked up in the house all day...You must be missing your parents” (Karnad1:268). She surrenders to his love as she looks for a surrogate-parent image in him. Appana of the day becomes a soothing husband of night. The husband who is the boss in the daylight, gives in, becomes submissive to his wife in the night. In between the fight of ego and instinct, instinct wins: “No, let’s say the husband decides on the day visits. And the wife decides on the night visits. So I won’t come at night if you don’t want me to.” “I am afraid that this is how it is going to be. Like that during the day. Like this at night. Don’t ask me why”(Karnad1: 272). It is to be seen that in a patriarchal society, it is not the women, who suffer alone. Men suffer as well. In a joint family, a husband’s open affection reduces him to the level of a slave to wife; Public display of affection is a kind of taboo. A husband suffers not only in the division of roles his wife carves for him that is to be a husband in the day and a lover at night, but also in its inability to change the rules formed by his own patriarchy. That’s why; he demands no question from Rani, as it will put him in the dilemma of questioning his own self. The day Appana becomes unconscious at the hands of small portion of aphrodisiac, his unconscious warned him against his own instinctive self that was the reason he brought a dog to safeguard himself against his own instincts. The dog kept barking the day Appana’s instincts got unleashed in the form of Naga. In a tussle with the guard, he sets himself against himself, the Head gets defeated at the hands of Instinct. The head represents Appana- his ego and Naga represent the tail- his instincts, when adjoined together they form a Mandala- A life in motion that moves outside to start all over again.

There are many reflections of Appana’s split personality and Rani has subconsciously realised the split, but in spite of it, she fails to question him. In his role of a surrogate parent for a while, Rani finds the affection. She is likened to a bird which is hooked by the Cobra’s sight: “The cobra simply hooks the bird’s eyes with its own sight. The bird stares- and stares- unable to move its eyes. It doesn’t feel any fear either. It stands fascinated, watching the changing colours in the eyes of the Cobra. It just stares, its wings half-opened as though it was sculpted in the sunlight” (Karnad1: 274). Rani’s innocence, immaturity is shown in her unawareness of sex. Naga explains sex to Rani as a universal phenomenon in most sensual imagery.

According to Lacan, the post-structural critic, there is a close connection between the text and the language used by the individual. Words are not limited to what is said, they express more than the words themselves. Naga’s explanation at once reminds of Lacan’s theory that the subject of the enunciation implies that the subject of the statement is continuously pervaded by other dimension of speech, another location of thought. In order to understand the unconscious thoughts then one should reach beyond what is said and how it is being said, towards an investigation of where things are being said from (Lacan 1:61-62). Naga, a phallic symbol, in the Indian mythology is worshipped as a deity of fertility and according to some myths, like the Yakshahs, they can make woman fertile. Appana’s instinctive side lost its inhibitions in the shape of Naga, his laconic and curt trait is replaced by the smooth sensuous poetic prose, which stuns Rani, as she stammers out of shock: “Goodness! Goats have to be sacrificed and buffaloes slaughtered to get a word out of you in the mornings.



But at night-how you talk!” (Karnad 1:276). It reaffirms the acknowledgement that Rani has of Appana’s Naga-form. The play seems to play with the ambiguity of Rani’s consciousness. The play clearly has a tone of feminism, but in the failure of Rani’s discovery about truth, the play seems to have an undertone, where the woman herself is in question. Rani gives in to her instinctual needs. The Naga for whom affection started with finding in him a parent figure, has grown into a passion for lover. The innocent, despising sex, immature Rani has now opened up to the carnal love. By using his erotic art, Naga has cured her frigidity. She is now familiar with her instinctive desires and impatiently arrives for her lover to come and embrace her, even though the conscious of Naga, not being her husband has made her way in her subconscious. The play in its ambivalent tone plays with the idea of Rani’s split consciousness regarding her husband’s identity. The transformation of Rani from a daughter to her parents to wife to her husband is now completed in a woman with a baby in her womb. But breaking of this news to Naga, brings back the split in her conscious. The fact that she knows is visible through her words. Rani discloses her pregnancy to Naga as a winning moment. The mirth, the excitement, all is visible. But the blackness in Naga is what she feared, she’ll see. Her instincts had warned her already. In Naga’s asking her to keep it a secret, she is aware of her adultery. When Appana gets to know about her pregnancy and beats her, smashes her. Appana’s conscious readily accepts Rani’s adultery, though the acceptance of his own split personality is hard to digest. Appana’s non-acceptance and refusal of his another self, makes him go to the elders of the village to test Rani’s chastity. When Rani questions

Naga about humiliating her, he manifests his helplessness of not being able to contradict the set norms of patriarchy at which he rightly remarks: “I can’t help it, Rani. That’s how has always been. That’s how it will always be” (Karnad1: 287). The uneasiness of her mind, the psychological disturbance is not only taking place in Rani, but Naga shares it too. Her intuition comes into work; it makes her anxious and warns her. Sigmund Freud also suggests that the intuition at the unconscious level operate as a warning signal to the ego of inner impulses, providing us with the ability to judge and anticipate the lurking danger, threat or loss. He asks Rani to undertake the Snake-Ordeal to pass in her test of chastity, which meant to put the hand into the ant-hill and pull out the King-Cobra and take oath by that Cobra. He pacifies the sacred Rani, and tells her to speak nothing else, but the truth. The Village Elders sit in judgement and Rani is summoned to prove her chastity. The personal act of love and affection is brought in public by Appana. In the context of the play, the test is to affirm Rani’s chastity, but in the suggestive meaning, it’s a test by Appana to ascertain, if he is Naga. Rani steps up to the ant-hill, sees the cobra and get the scare of her life. And in that moment she encounters Kurudaava, who tells her that a Yaksha woman had taken her son. In Kurudavva’s situation, Rani realizes that if desires are strong, it’s bound to reach us and in no time, she reaches the ant-hill, puts her hand into it, pulls the cobra out and speaks the truth that other than her husband and the King Cobra, no other male sex has touched her. Rani indeed spoke the truth in her full consciousness and as well as subconscious, the dawn of realization has come, the knowledge that the man she’s been sleeping with all this while, is none other than the Cobra. The Cobra slides up her shoulder and spreads its



hood. It sways its hood gently for a while and then moves over her shoulder like a garland. And Rani is elevated to the position of a Goddess, a Divine Being. Thus, Naga fulfilled his promise. This miracle makes Appana surrender, but his conscience isn't shut. His misery has sort of poignancy to it. The "I" represents conscious, the logic. Though he has accepted her in the eyes of society but there hasn't been a harmony within his own conscious and unconscious, he still blames Rani of adultery in his sub-conscious. It is not only Appana, who deals with this psychological disturbance. Rani is the victim of the same. She realized the moment she got in bed with Appana after the trail that he is other man, every night this conundrum spread its hood out at her. The split is evident in both of them.

### Conclusion:

The above paper clearly depicts that the way of human subjectivity is constituted by ideological baggage. The characters of Appana, Rani and Naga bring us face to face with the most elusive psychological drives, apparent and hidden, the desire to power, completion and the problem of identity that motivates them to excessive actions. The chaos within and without is presented in the characters blatantly. Karnad has given his characters the choice to chose, as it is in freedom of choice only, that lives are altered.

### References:

- [1]Choudhuri, IndraNath. *Comparative Indian Literature: Some Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1992. Print
- [2]Dharwadkar, AparnaBhargava. Introduction. *Collected Plays*.Vol.1. ByGirishKarnad. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. Vii-xiix. Print.
- [3]Karnad, Girish. *Collected Plays*.Vol.1.New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.
- [4] Karnad, Girish. Appendix.*Collected Plays*.Vol.1.1. ByKarnad. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010.301-315. Print.
- [5]Lear, Jonathan. *Freud*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005. Print.
- [6] Lacan, Jacques. "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud."*Literary Criticism and Theory: An Anthology (From Beginning to present)*. Delhi: Doaba Publication, 2008. Print.
- [7] Michael, Ryan. *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Massachussettes: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999. Print.
- [8] Rabate, Jean Michel, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*.United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.